

Littlestown Borough History

Excerpted from the 1965 Littlestown Bicentennial Book and Adams County Independent of 1914.

The Conewago Settlement was a colony, made up principally of Germans, situated in the southeastern part of what is now Adams County, Pennsylvania. The long and somewhat tragic border disputes between the Penn's and the Calvert's were the cause of the first settlers coming into this section.

On this disputed tract, settlers purchased lands from both John Digges and the Penn's. Digges began selling land in "Digges Choice" territory as early as 1731 before the first official survey was completed in 1734. Fighting began when some of the pioneers refused to pay taxes to Maryland, claiming that the territory belonged to the Province of Pennsylvania. Among the casualties was Dudley Digges, John Digges' son. Andrew Schreiber (Shriver), historically-speaking, is regarded as the first settler "At Conewago". The Schreibers moved to Pennsylvania in 1721 and settled locally in 1734 on a farm (later owned by Elias Basehoar) about three miles east of town, near Christ Church, along the former trolley line to Hanover. The Schreibers purchased 100 acres from John Digges and paid for it with 100 pairs of negro shoes. In 1752, according to the records, there were forty persons living on tracts sold under the Maryland rights. The long years of trouble came to an end with the establishment of the Mason Dixon Line.

Littlestown, or Petersburg, located in the extreme southwestern portion of Digges' tract, was part of the Conewago Settlement. It is probably the oldest town in what is now Adams County, having been laid out in 1765 by Peter Klein (or Little), 15 years before James Gettys laid out Gettysburg and one year after Richard McAllister founded Hanover. Adams County was formed from part of York County thirty-five years later. For at least 50 years, the village was known as "Kleina Stedtle" (in English "Little's Town"). Later it became Petersburg, but since the present York Springs was also known by the same name, a great deal of confusion resulted. Both communities changed their names..one became York Springs, the other Littlestown after a post office was established in 1795. Peter Klein died eight years after laying out the town and is buried in the graveyard of Christ Church off Route 194, a church which had been founded in 1747 by the Rev. Michael Schlatter.

Peter Klein (Little) had been granted a patent September 18, 1760, by the Proprietaries of the Province of Pennsylvania for 311 acres. As originally laid out, Littlestown contained 84 lots, systematically arranged, in equal and regular order, fronting on both sides of what are now King and Queen Streets. Each lot was 66-feet wide and 264 feet deep and sold for three pounds with the provision that the buyer pay as annual ground rent of seven shillings, six pence (\$1.00). Although when and where the first house was erected could not be determined for certain, the house at 316 East King Street is supposedly the oldest in town.

First School in Littlestown, PA It was near Littlestown that the first school in Adams County was opened near Christ Church, years before 1747. The first teacher was John Krentz and German was exclusively taught. For many years, Littlestown had two log school buildings – one at the east end and one at the west end of town. In 1872, the first brick school building was erected where the present Community Center stands. The present Community Center building was built in 1901.

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General “Mad” Anthony Wayne, with a division of Washington’s Army, passed through Littlestown in May of 1781 on the way to Yorktown to capture Cornwallis at the end of the Revolutionary War. His stop-over may have led to rumors that Washington had visited Littlestown.

An important early event in the community’s history came about in the 1807-1808-09 time period with the building of the Littlestown (Petersburg)-Gettysburg Turnpike. This made Littlestown an important stop for those who drove from Pittsburgh to Baltimore. It was the last stop before entering Maryland. Littlestown was thus a cross-roads town with the Baltimore-Pittsburgh route crossing the Monacacy Road from Frederick to Wrightsville and the Susquehanna River. With the coming of the railroad in 1857 came new lots, two warehouses and a new hotel. The Barker House, a hotel at the northwest corner of King and Queen Streets, had been built in 1848. The population climbed from 394 in 1850 to 702 in 1860. In 1797, it had been reported in the American Gazetter that “Petersburg” had a Catholic Church and about 80 houses.

On June 29, General Kilpatrick’s Division of Union Cavalry bivouacked for the night around Littlestown. Kilpatrick and General George Custer, of Little Big Horn fame, lodged at the Barker House. The next morning, the division of 5000 men took part in the cavalry engagement with 600 Confederates under Jeb Stuart at Hanover. General Pleasanton, commanding the Cavalry Corps of the Army of the Potomac, headquartered at the Barker House, where he received the word that Stuart had been defeated at Hanover. Slocum’s Corps of 13,000 infantry entered Littlestown that evening and was dispatched to Gettysburg the next day. General Sedgewick’s Sixth Army Corps of 15,000 also passed through Littlestown on their way to the Battle. After the Battle, hundreds of wounded soldiers were brought in ambulances from Gettysburg placed on railroad cars at Littlestown. General Daniel E. Sickles, who had lost a leg at Round Top during the Battle of Gettysburg, was among the wounded treated in Littlestown.

It was nearly a century after its establishment that Littlestown was legally recognized with incorporation as a Borough by the Court of Adams County on February 23, 1864. A vote to determine the status of the community had been ordered held on February 28, 1863. Thirty four votes were cast in favor, 28 in opposition of the incorporation. There were 96 freehold residents in the new borough. The first election was held in August of 1864 with W. Frank Crouse elected Burgess (Mayor). Elected as Councilmen were Noah P. Weikert, John Spangler, Sr., David Schwartz, George Stonesifer and Dr. J. S. Kemp. The first official act of the new Council was to borrow \$2,000 “for the purpose of procuring volunteers to fill the quota of said Borough”.

Public utilities made an appearance in Littlestown with electricity going into service in 1897. Columbia Gas acquired an oil line which crossed Pennsylvania in 1930 for the purpose of transporting natural gas. Gas was piped into the borough in 1933. Public water was discussed and a Water Works approved by Borough Council in 1895. The first borough water system was authorized from 1895 to 1932. The present water supply was supplemented with the purchase of the William V. Sneeringer property quarry in 1954. The Borough’s sewer system was built under the WPA (Works Progress Administration) in 1941, with the completion of the sewage disposal plant in 1948. The first Post Office was established on April 1, 1795. Rural mail service started in 1903. Apparently, the first telephone service came to Littlestown in 1892 through the Adams County Telephone Company and the final switchboard operator was phased out in 1961.

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Littlestown grew steadily with a population of 250 in 1800. Twenty years later, the population had reached 305. In 1850, it was 394 and by 1870 had reached 847. The 1880 census listed 913 residents. The 1886 census showed 298 taxpayers, 75 horses, 18 cows, 53 pleasure carriages, and 27 gold watches.

Church going has been a way of life for many in Littlestown over the years. St. John's Lutheran Church was established in 1763, St. Aloysius Catholic Church in 1790, the United Brethren Church in 1822, the Methodist Episcopal Church in 1828, Redeemers United Church of Christ in 1859, and St. Paul's Evangelical Lutheran Church in 1863-66.

Littlestown has grown from a stagecoach stop on the road from Baltimore to Pittsburgh to a thriving community with urban and rural problems. Many industries have prospered in the past while those remaining, the Littlestown Foundry, Masterbrand, Hadco and several horse farms continue to thrive.

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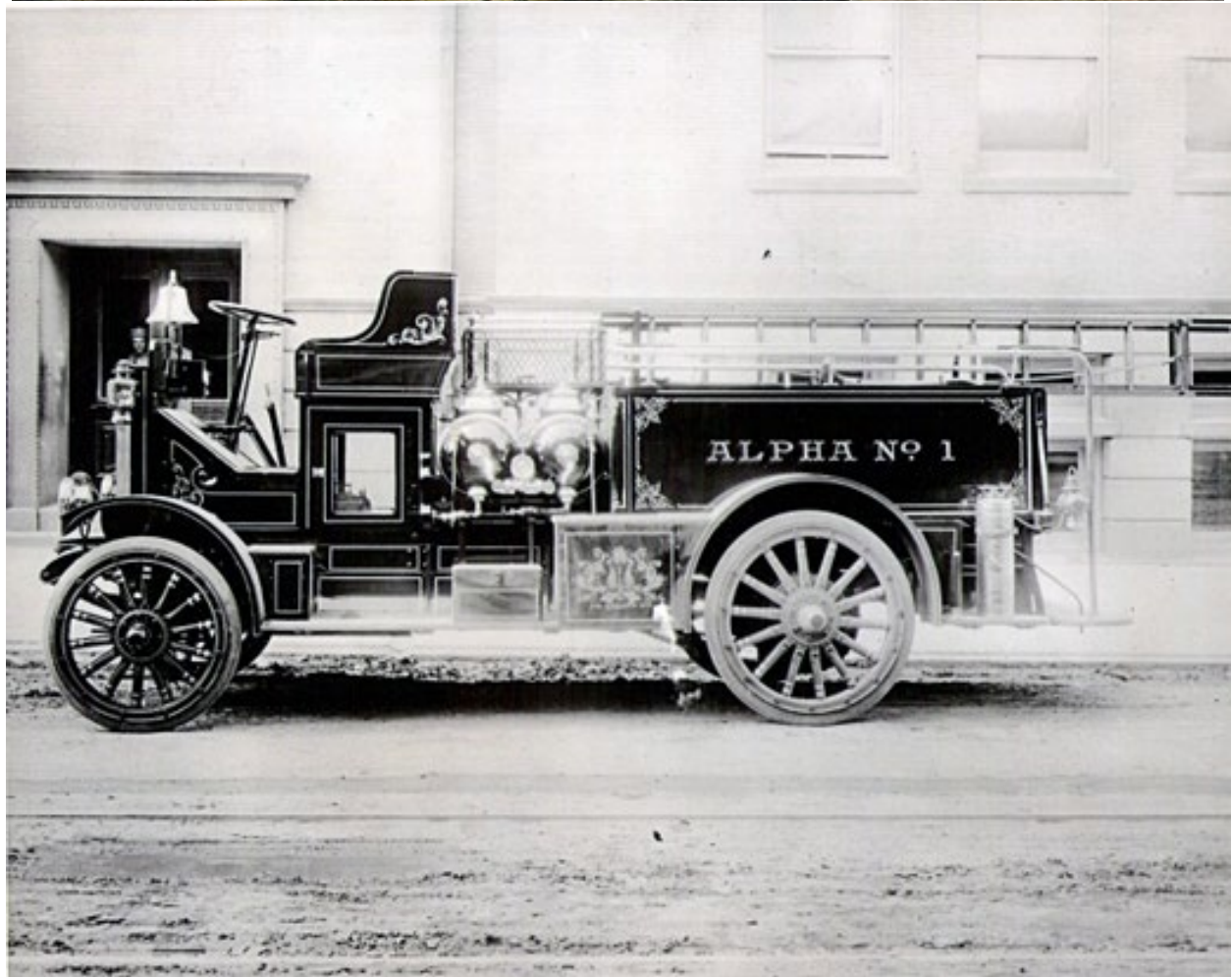
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Littlestown Photo Gallery



Littlestown Borough History



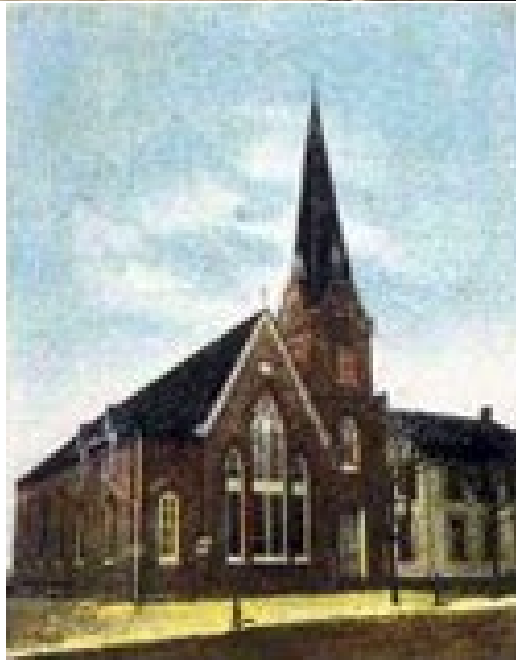
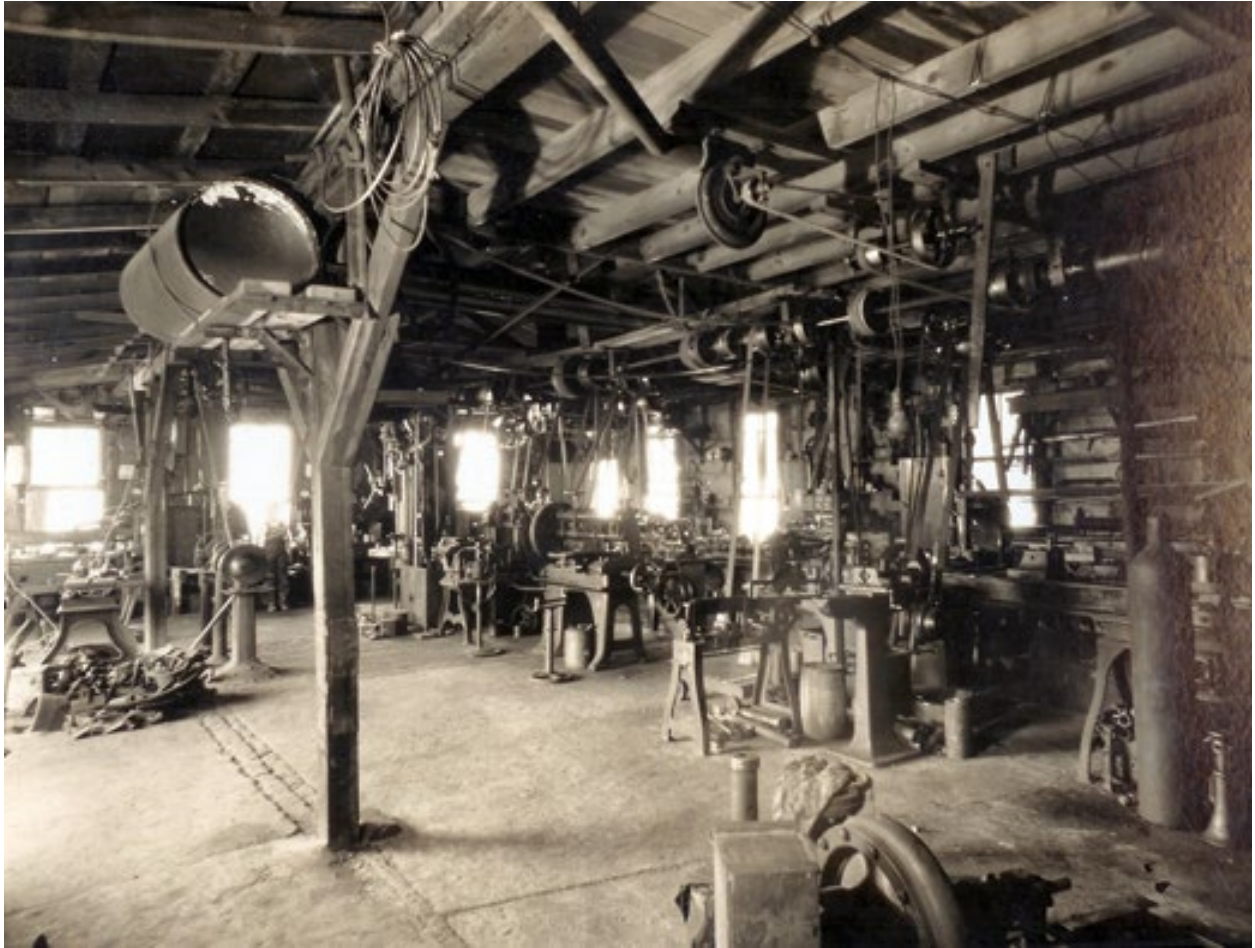
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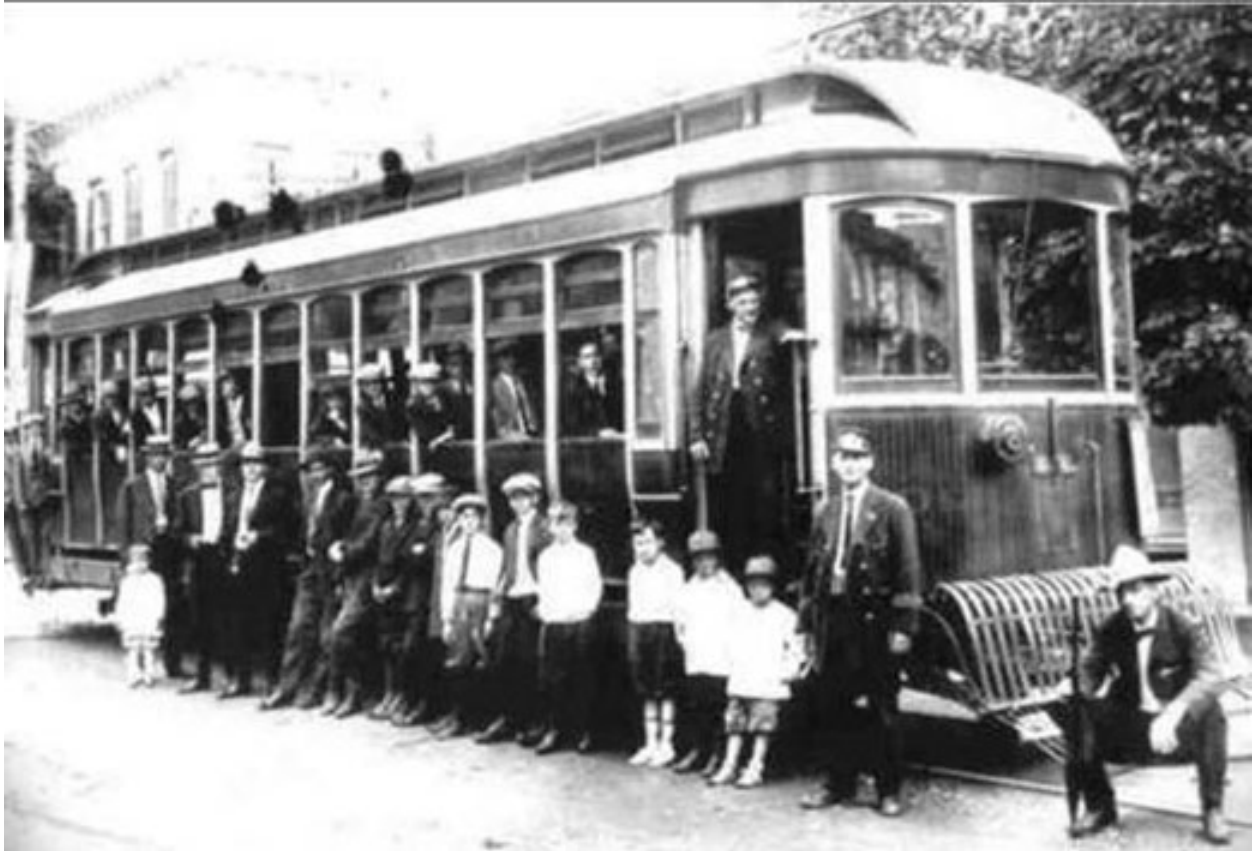
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